

# Excavations at Raglan Castle, Monmouthshire, 2003–07

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with a contribution by PAUL COURTNEY

## INTRODUCTION

Between 2003 and 2007 various excavations were carried out at Raglan Castle, Monmouthshire (SO 415 083, Fig. 1). The excavations were carried out prior to the development of a new visitor centre and associated services adjacent to the seventeenth-century White Gate. In 2003 Cambrian Archaeological

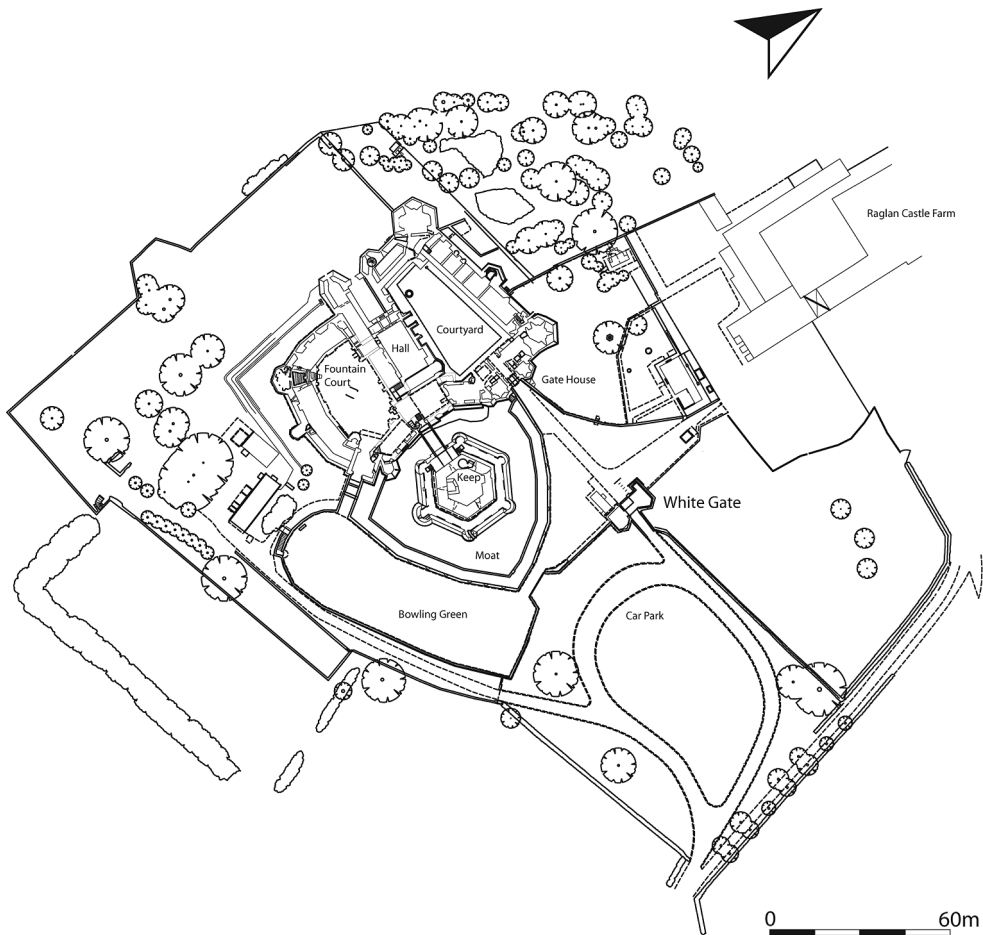


Fig. 1. Plan of Raglan Castle. © Crown copyright: Cadw.

Projects Ltd (CAP) began, as part of the planning process, a program of work involving the excavation of six evaluation trenches, six smaller test pits and four larger areas. This work was located within the footprint of the proposed visitor centre and its associated services and was designed to assess the nature and quality of the archaeological resource within these areas as well as the relative depth of archaeological deposits. The resulting information gathered from the evaluation work was then used to inform the below ground design of the visitor centre.

Raglan Castle is located 500 metres to the north of the village of Raglan and stands approximately 60 metres above Ordnance Datum on a gently sloping ridge overlooking the Usk Valley to the south-west giving a commanding view of the surrounding countryside. The topography of the area is characterised by the gently undulating ground on which both the castle and the village are sited and the higher ground to the south and west adjacent to the river Usk. The underlying solid geology of the area is mainly comprised of Lower Old Red Sandstone including Dowtonian (British Geological Survey 2001). The majority of land in the surrounding area is subject to pastoral agriculture.

### Archaeological and historical background

Although an older castle may have once stood on the site, most of what is now visible of Raglan Castle was begun around 1432 by William ap Thomas, an obscure Welsh knight who made good through a lucrative marriage and a profitable spell in the French wars. Although he acquired Raglan through his wife, it was only in 1432 that he obtained outright possession thus making it likely that he began Raglan Castle after that date (Kenyon 2003). The most notable feature of his building campaign is the moated



Fig. 2. Plan of Raglan Castle in 1652 by Laurence Smythe (with north to the top left).  
By courtesy, His Grace the Duke of Beaufort.

keep, which dominates the castle while standing apart. Its hexagonal plan—rare in Britain—shows the influence of his French campaigns (Pettifer 2000; Stanford, 1980). Much of the inner courtyard can also be attributed to William ap Thomas before his death in 1445. There was a lengthy pause before his son, William Herbert, completed the inner courtyard and built an outer one beyond. After crushing the last vestiges of Lancastrian resistance at Harlech Castle in 1468, William was made earl of Pembroke (Stanford 1980). However, he was beheaded after the Battle of Edgecote when Edward IV was briefly overthrown by the Earl of Warwick (Pettifer 2000). The next great phase of building work was undertaken by William Somerset, third earl of Worcester. He is credited with remodelling the Hall range, constructing the long gallery and extending the pitched stone court as well as creating many of the pleasure gardens around the castle (Kenyon 2003). Henry, the fifth earl, is credited with the construction of the Red Gate and White Gate some time after his accession in 1628. The first marquess of Worcester was a staunch Royalist and hence Raglan became the last outpost of Royalist resistance in south Wales during the Civil War. With the full might of Parliament against it, the castle creditably withstood ten weeks of bombardment before surrendering in August 1646. Hurriedly-constructed earthen siege works are visible around the site of Raglan Castle. The 1646 siege is represented by a small pentagonal earthwork with a salient pointing towards the castle on a slight rise about 216 metres east-north-east of the castle (Kenyon 1982, cited in Harrington 1992). On the ground a shallow ditch can be made out in front of a concrete reservoir but from the air the siegework can be clearly seen. This may have been the site of Morgan's Battery, which was constructed to fire at the towers of the castle (Harrington 1992). Raglan in the early seventeenth century was a grandiose residence surrounded by formal gardens and two enclosed deer parks shown on John Speed's 1610 map of Gwent (Whittle 1992). A plan of Raglan by Laurence Smythe in 1652 held in the Badminton House collection shows the approach to the castle (Fig. 2), now severed by the A40. The approach led people over a causeway between two formal ponds before climbing the hill towards the Red Gate in front of the White Gate (Whittle 1992; Kenyon, 2003). Topographic and geophysical survey work recently undertaken by the Museum of London Archaeology Service has highlighted the location of these features (Clark 2005). Raglan Castle immediately prior to the outbreak of the Civil War can be shown to be a grand residence surrounded on all sides by neatly laid out gardens, ponds, walks, a bowling green and two enclosed deer parks (Whittle 1992).

#### THE 2003–07 EXCAVATIONS

The excavations undertaken at Raglan Castle can be divided into four main areas (Fig. 3). Area 1 is located on the external bank and ditch to the south west of the White Gate in the area of a planned geothermal borehole heat exchange system (Figs 4–5). Area 2 is located at the internal base of the White Gate itself. Area 3 is the flat, grassed space opposite the Closet Tower. Area 4, the largest of all the excavated areas, represents the footprint of the visitor centre (and associated service runs) adjacent to the north-eastern corner of the White Gate (Figs 6–7). Figures 8–11 show the plans and sections of the various excavation areas and the various phases belonging to the site.

Excavation work undertaken between 2003 and 2007 as well as analysis of the finds recovered has identified clear phases of activity within the excavated areas of Raglan Castle which are summarised below. Whilst there are certain aspects of the excavated material which may pre-date this phasing system this was largely restricted to a limited number of finds.

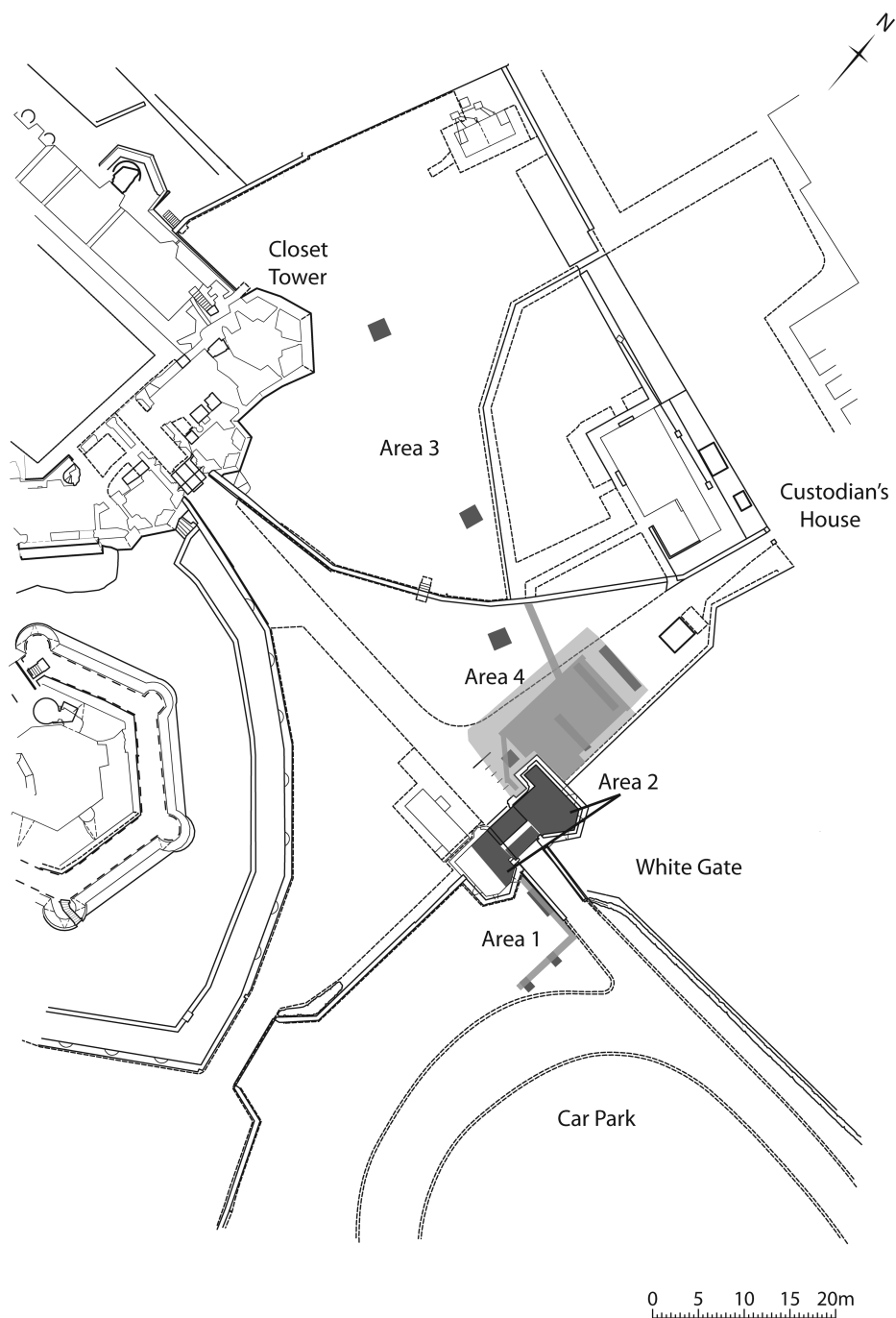


Fig. 3. Plan showing locations of different excavation areas within Raglan Castle.  
*After* © Crown copyright: Cadw.



Fig. 4. Elevated view of Raglan Castle looking north-west. *Photograph: author.*

#### PHASE 1 – FIFTEENTH TO SIXTEENTH CENTURIES

Phase 1 at Raglan Castle (began in 1432 by William ap Thomas and ending in 1599 during Edward Somerset's ownership) represents all the major standing buildings and is a period little evidenced by the recent excavations. Within the areas of Raglan Castle in which excavations were undertaken Phase 1 (and possibly earlier) is characterised primarily by residual or redeposited finds. These were mainly ceramic finds (Malvernian oxidised and Cisterican wares as well as locally produced sandy micaceous ridge tiles and a single floor tile) although a small number of small finds of this date were also found to be residual within seventeenth-century contexts. No features or structures within the excavation areas can be shown to date to Phase 1.

Layers (206, 214 and 215) within Area 4 would appear to be the earliest contexts encountered during the 2003–07 works and are of pre-seventeenth-century (Phase 1) date. They were cut by the construction of early seventeenth-century 'funnelled' entrance features as well as being overlain by securely datable seventeenth century horizons. The layers were again cut for the construction of the White Gate in the late 1620s by Henry Somerset. Layers located beneath the rough seventeenth-century surfaces identified by the two borehole excavations in Area 1 are also likely to belong to Phase 1 although a lack of securely datable material from these contexts prevents this being confirmed. Those Phase 1 finds recovered during the excavations were mainly ceramics. A single fragment of decorated late thirteenth-century floor tile, thought to come from a structure standing on the site before Raglan Castle, was recovered although again



Fig. 5. View of Borehole trench in Area 1 looking south-west.

from a seventeenth-century horizon. Whilst the lower layers exposed in the Area 1 borehole excavations produced no securely datable material they are likely to date to Phase 1 owing to their being beneath seventeenth-century horizons. It is also possible that the lowest layers, located immediately above natural ground levels, represent a pre Phase 1 period.

#### PHASE 2 – AD 1600–46

Phase 2 within Raglan Castle covers the remodelling of the forecourt, the erection of the Red Gate and White Gate, and the development of the castle gardens as illustrated on Smythe's 1652 map. The construction of the funnelled entranceway and associated landscaping adjacent to the Gatehouse range, specifically the Closet Tower, was carried out during this phase under Edward Somerset (fourth earl of



Fig. 6. View of Area 4 under excavation looking south-west.

Worcester). Construction work on the White Gate, the Red Gate and associated landscaping between the two was also begun in this phase but is attributable to the slightly later Henry Somerset (fifth earl and first marquess of Worcester). The second English Civil War, notably including the ten-week siege of Raglan Castle culminating in its fall in August 1646, is included within this phase. Construction work and associated landscaping carried out during this phase was strongly evidenced within the recent excavations.

Phase 2 (Figs 8 and 11) at Raglan comprises the majority of the construction work uncovered during the 2003–07 excavations. Structural evidence from Phase 2 was uncovered adjacent to and within the White Gate itself. The parallel walls and cobbled surface located in Area 4 would appear to form part of the castle's funnelled entranceway. The funnelled entranceway was an early seventeenth-century addition to Raglan Castle by Edward Somerset (d. 1628) (Kenyon 2003). Excavations in Area 3, whilst producing material clearly dating to Phase 4 within the topsoil horizon, have shown that the area appears to have been reduced in level, hence the presence of natural clay at a relatively shallow depth. This reduction in level is likely to have been carried out during the early seventeenth century in order to emphasise the creation of the funnelled entrance, the ground level dropping away on both right and left upon approaching the Gatehouse Range. The reduction of the ground level opposite the Closet Tower, on the east of the approach, seems to have been undertaken to enhance the visual effect of the funnelled entranceway. Edward Somerset was also responsible for the creation of the Moat Walk and the walled bowling green which resulted in a reduction of level on the west of the approach. The construction of the



Fig. 7. View of Area 4 under excavation looking north-east.

White Gate was undertaken in Phase 2 during Henry Somerset's ownership of Raglan. Evidence for this can be seen in the White Gate foundation trench cutting Phase 1 layers (206, 214 and 215). The brick culvert located to the rear of the White Gate (Figs 6–7) is also likely to date to this phase as its construction appears to both respect the rear wall of the White Gate and cut similar Phase 1 horizons. Datable material excavated from within the culvert shows it to have been in use from the early part of the seventeenth century onwards.

Phase 2 structural evidence from within the White Gate itself (Area 2) was uncovered during excavations at the base of the east and west towers and the low archways joining the two. A brick culvert, similar to that seen in Area 4, was uncovered within a mixed clay and rubble horizon interpreted as a sub-floor horizon. The culvert ran from the west tower into the first of the two archways where it appeared to terminate having likely been truncated by Phase 4 consolidation works. Beneath likely phase 3 abandonment deposits in the eastern tower and located adjacent to the eastern wall a damaged fireplace and hearth was located. A raised line of brick represented the edge of the hearth and beyond this, extending southwards into the tower a further brick surface was noted.

Examples of Phase 2 material were also seen on the outside of the White Gate in Area 1. These were primarily made up of rough stone surfaces and levelling deposits above the Phase 1 deposits observed within the borehole excavations. A small brick built 'step' or possible wall base was observed within and apparently running parallel with the White Gate ditch. Excavation constraints limited the exposure of this feature.



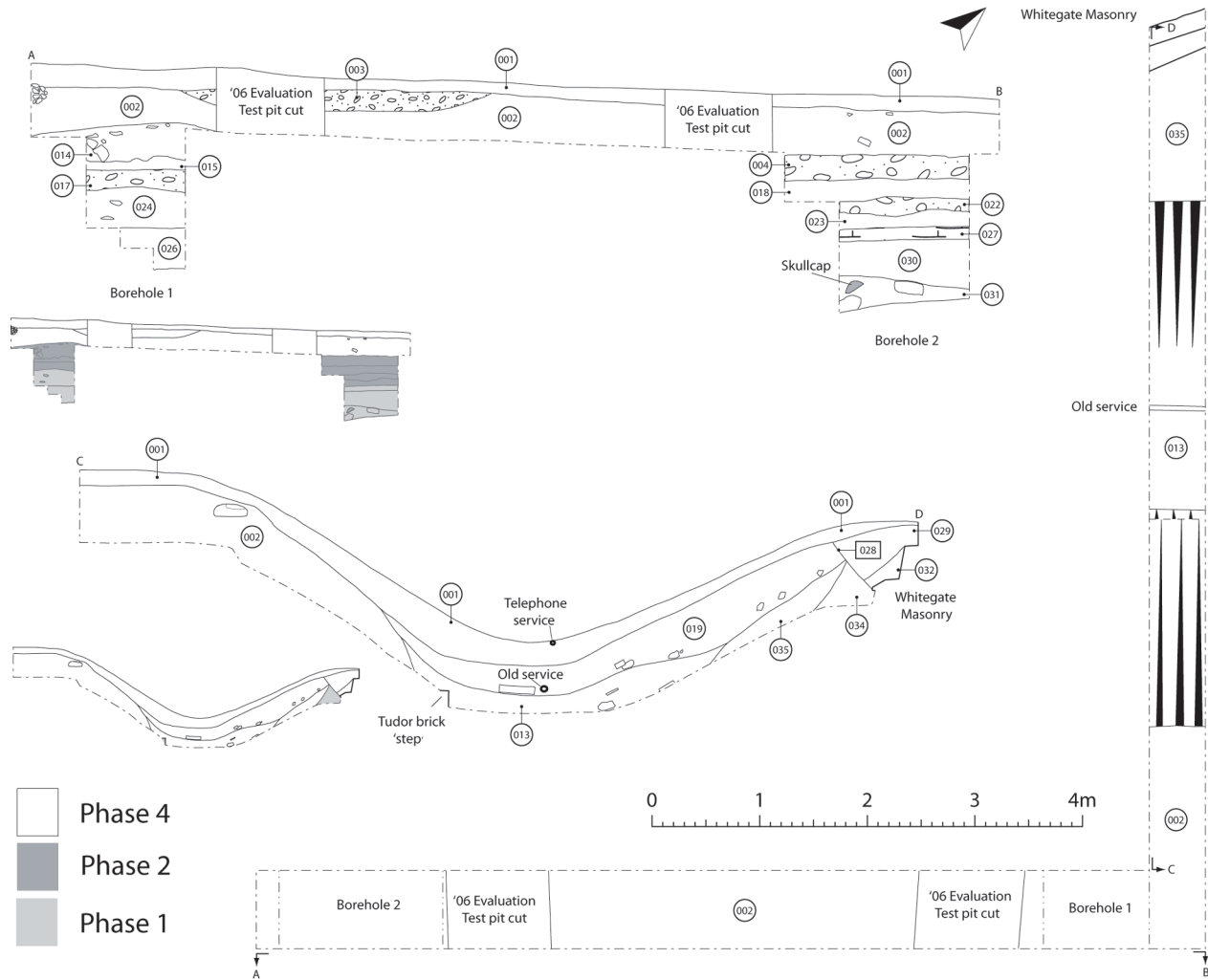


Fig. 8. Plans and sections of Area 1.

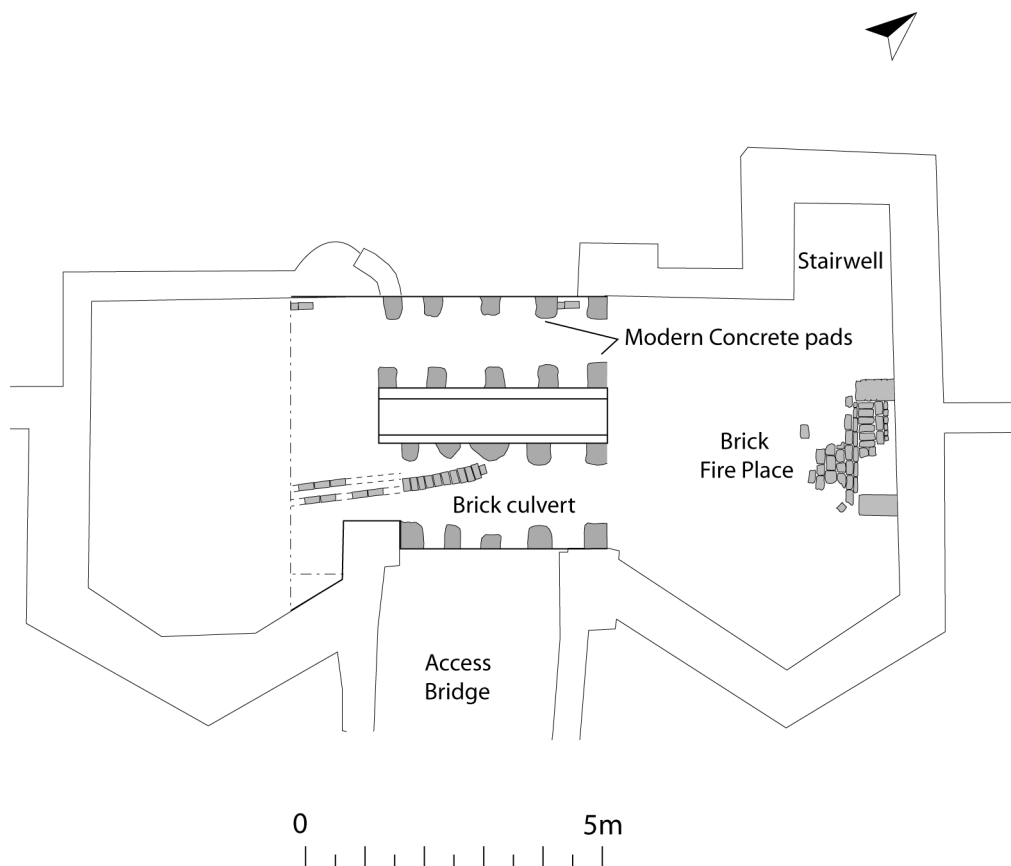


Fig. 9. Plan of Area 2.

Evidence of the Civil War siege which marked the fall of the castle and thus the end of Phase 2 was also uncovered. The wider effects of the ten-week Civil War siege of 1646 on the castle are clear but showed in the excavated evidence only through material culture. Several lead shot were recovered, some having clearly been fired at the castle. One of the lead shot had never been fired as a large casting nipple was still present. This represented only a single piece amongst several suggestive of *in situ* shot manufacture, most likely whilst under siege conditions.

#### PHASE 3 – AD 1647–1756

Phase 3 (Fig 11) at Raglan is characterised by the slighting of the castles defences and the subsequent abandonment this would have necessitated and the subsequent despoliation of Raglan Castle in the 110 years immediately following the siege which marked the end of Phase 2. Certain contexts, most likely abandonment horizons can, however, be assigned to Phase 3.

After its fall the castle at Raglan along with the lordship of Chepstow was granted to Oliver Cromwell but was regained by the Somerset family before the end of the Commonwealth (Kenyon 2003). Any

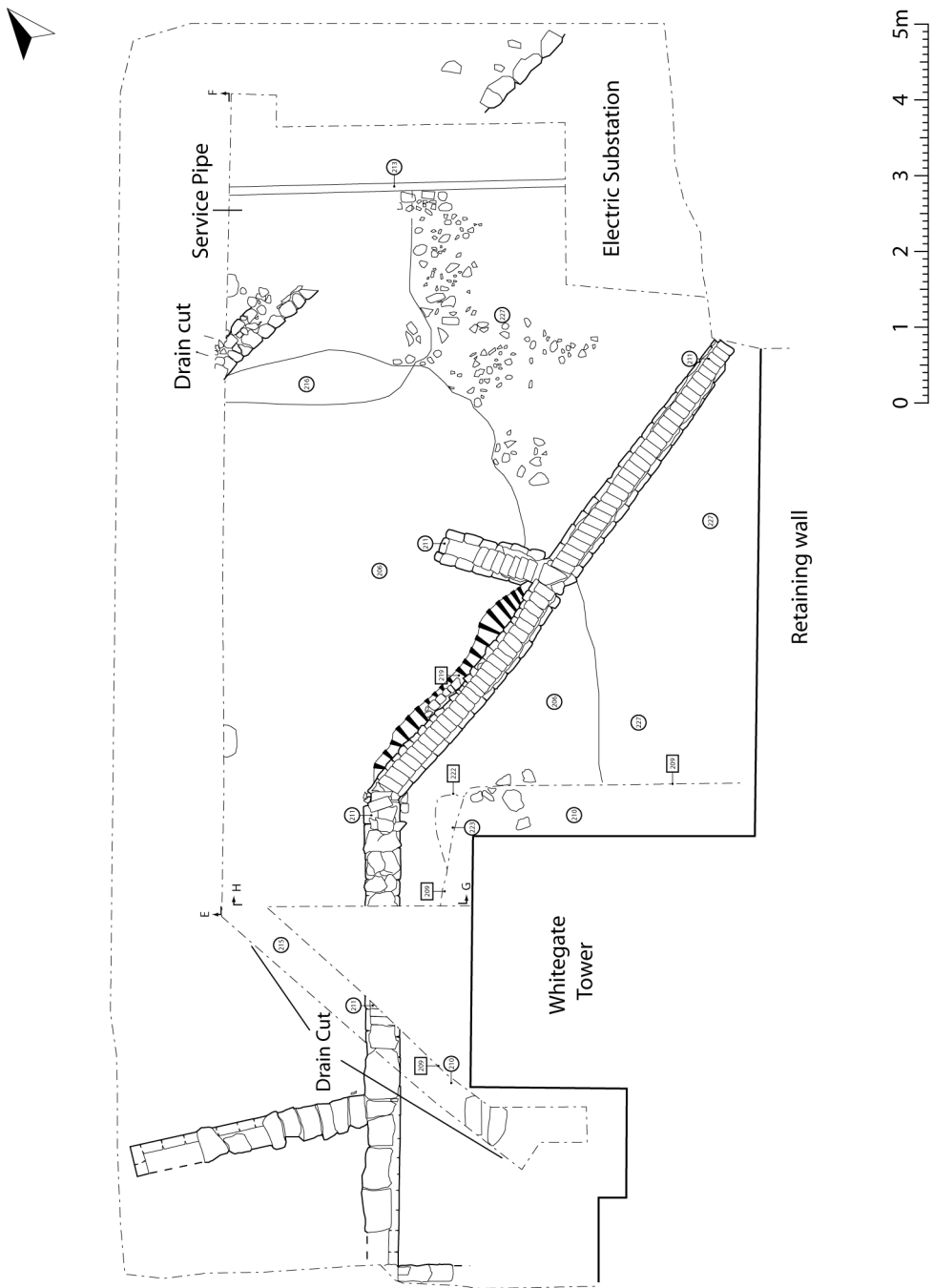


Fig. 10. Plan of Area 4.

thoughts of rebuilding Raglan were abandoned, and the family erected Badminton House in Gloucestershire and Troy House near Monmouth after the Restoration. This abandonment of the castle largely explains the lack of material dating from the end of the seventeenth and start of the eighteenth centuries. Raglan Castle was subsequently used as a local source of building material, until this was stopped in 1756 by the fifth duke of Beaufort (Kenyon 2003). The walls of the funnelled entranceway exposed in Area 4 seem to have been destroyed and the ground levelled with a redeposited clay horizon, this is likely to be attributable to Phase 3 activity on the adjacent Raglan Castle farm. The damage to the brick fireplace and culvert located at the base of the White Gate (Area 2) along with the removal of the floor levels in the White Gate must also date to this period. Datable material belonging to this phase is restricted to a few ceramics although activity is evidenced by destruction and levelling of the funnelled entrance walls located in Area 4. As expected from what is known about the history of the castle no structural evidence can be attributed to Phase 3.

#### PHASE 4 – AD 1656 TO PRESENT

Phase 4 represents the period in which Raglan Castle began to be appreciated as a ‘romantic’ ruin. Limited repairs in the nineteenth century and comprehensive consolidation after the Ministry of Works took over the site in 1938 has produced the present day appearance and use of the monument. This phase is the most common within the recent excavated material and is represented through finds, features and contexts.

Evidence belonging to Phase 4 at Raglan was found in all areas of excavation (Figs 8 and 11). After the fifth duke of Beaufort’s efforts to stop the quarrying of the castle in 1756 Raglan became increasingly attractive to visitors as a ‘romantic’ ruin. Minor repairs were carried out at the castle in the nineteenth century and again immediately after the Second World War. Structural evidence belonging to Phase 4 uncovered by the recent excavations included the re-pointing of the White Gate retaining walls in Areas 1 and 4, cement and concrete pads and hut foundations belonging to the Ministry of Works in Areas 2 and 4 and concrete underpinning of the White Gate frontage uncovered in Area 2. Large amounts of vessel glass, pottery and clay tobacco pipe as well as several coins, all dating to the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries were recovered from every area of excavation. The majority of this material was recovered from the upper fills of the White Gate ditch in Area 1 immediately adjacent to the access bridge. Later landscaping following the removal of the Ministry of Works huts in Area 4 was also evidenced by a redeposited clay horizon.

#### THE FINDS

A large assemblage of finds was recovered from the excavations. The majority of the finds were ceramics, faunal remains, glass and clay tobacco pipes although metal objects including several small finds were also present. The animal bone assemblage accounted for almost one third of the total finds within Area 4 with 310 pieces being recovered. Most of these were recovered from dumped contexts rather than in association with any features. The majority belong to pig, sheep and cow although the presence of antler within the assemblage suggests that animals were brought from the deer park surrounding the castle. The glass assemblage was also very large (272 fragments) and was mostly composed of vessel glass although a few pieces of window glass were present. The vessel glass came largely from one context (context 013 located in the ditch section of Area 1) and appears to be late nineteenth-century in date. The window

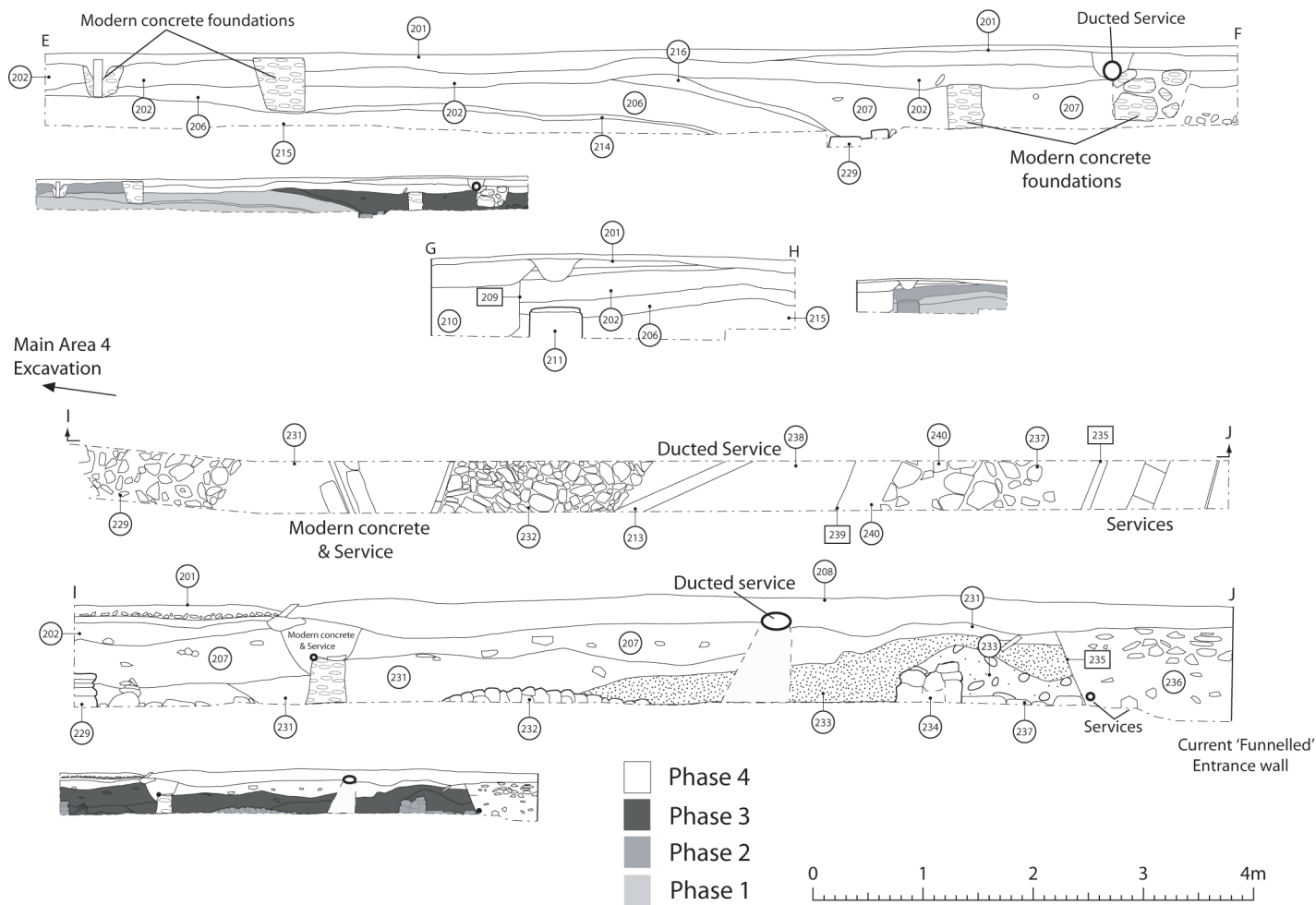


Fig. 11. Plan and sections of Area 4.

glass, of which only 10 fragments were recovered, came mostly from various seventeenth-century contexts within Area 4. A human skullcap was located at the base of the borehole 2 excavation amongst large blocks of masonry within a pre seventeenth-century layer. Owing to the paucity of identifiable features no further research has been undertaken.

#### SMALL FINDS

By Chris Smith

#### **Metalwork**

The small finds recovered can be broken down into two main categories; militaria and fittings (Fig. 12). The military objects are largely spent and intact lead shot (six pistol balls, eight musket balls) and scrap lead associated with shot manufacture, all of which appear to be attributable to Phase 2. Shot manufacture was clearly under way within the castle, most likely during the 1646 siege, as two lead shot casting strips, one musket ball miscast and a pistol ball with an unclipped casting nipple were recovered. Further evidence of shot manufacture is that the majority of the scrap pieces of lead recovered weigh almost exactly the same as the average weight of the musket shot (32 grams) and pistol shot (11 grams) recovered during the excavation with only 1 gram deviation either way. The majority of shot was recovered from excavations undertaken in Area 4, notably inside the castle and within direct line of shot to where the Parliamentary battery was located to the north-east. A further seventeenth-century military object recovered from Area 4 was a lead bandolier/gunpowder cartridge top (Fig. 12, no. 1; cf. Egan 2005). This particular object is a common find on Civil War battlefields and encampments and seems likely to have been a Phase 2 Royalist loss.

The fittings category includes 6 buckles (2 oval, 2 D-shaped, 2 rectangular), 1 belt hook and a single small rowel spur. A copper-alloy oval buckle with a central bar was recovered from within the main brick culvert located in Area 4 (Fig. 12, no. 2). It measured 48mm long and 36mm wide. Whitehead (1996) shows an exact example; 'Bilobed knops at two symmetrical points on the outside edge of each loop. Moulded rosette on each loop. Lobed knop either end of the strap bar which is recessed from the front edge'. Dates for the buckle are given as being 1550–1650. Owing to the context from which it was recovered this is likely to belong to Phase 2. A further copper alloy buckle was recovered from (231) which is of Phase 2 date owing to its context (Fig. 12, no. 3). The buckle is plated with gilt and shows moulded circles and triangles on the surviving brooch arms with a fleur-de-lys design on the brooch end.

Two copper alloy D-shaped buckles (Fig. 12, no. 4) were also recovered although both were located within modern contexts and are therefore likely to be redeposited. A comparable example, though in iron rather than copper alloy, can be found in Egan (2005, 36, example 96) dating to 1530–50 (Phase 1).

The two rectangular buckles are both iron examples and may represent spur/shoe buckles (Fig. 12, no. 5). Both were recovered in Area 1, external to the White Gate, from secure seventeenth-century contexts (Phase 2). Two comparable mid seventeenth-century examples can be found in Egan (2005, 37, examples 115 and 119). The single iron belt hook was recovered from the same area and context as the two rectangular buckle examples and is therefore likely to be similar in date.

A small (20mm diameter) copper alloy seven-pointed rowel spur was also recovered during the course of the excavations (Fig. 12, no. 6). The spur is seemingly fifteenth- or sixteenth-century in date (Phase 1; cf. Mills 1999, 93) but was recovered from a secure seventeenth-century context (Phase 2). The spur is likely to be more decorative than functional owing to the decorative line on each point and the softness of the metal from which it is manufactured.

Falling into neither the militaria nor fittings categories were two further small finds. A fine sixteenth-

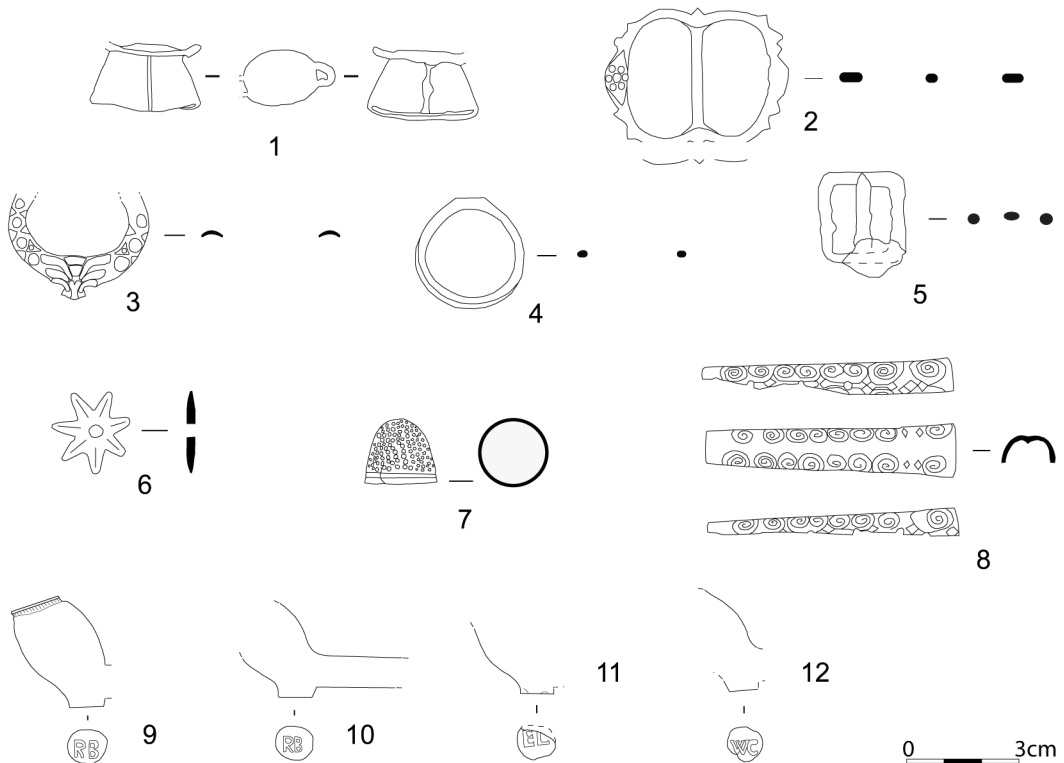


Fig. 12. Small finds.

century copper alloy thimble was recovered from context (207) in Area 4 (Fig. 12, no. 7). The thimble is constructed from a single sheet of copper alloy and measures 19mm both in height and diameter. A good parallel can be found in Egan (2005, 131–2) dating the Raglan example to *c.* 1530–50. An intricately spiral decorated bone knife handle was also recovered (Fig. 12, no. 8). This measured 65mm in length by 14mm in diameter. No part of the knife was remaining. This was recovered from the same context within Area 4 as the previously mentioned rowel spur.

### Clay tobacco pipes

The clay tobacco pipes also form a relatively large part of the assemblage (Fig. 12). The majority of the assemblage was mostly non-diagnostic clay pipe stem although 9 diagnostic clay pipe bowls were also recovered. Two bowls, one partially damaged, bear the maker's mark 'RB' (Fig. 12, nos 9–10). These are likely to be pipes of Richard Berriman who was producing clay pipes in Bristol between 1619–52. Berriman was a founder member of the Bristol pipe makers' guild but was later struck off the list (Walker, 1971, Jackson & Price, 1974). The form of the pipe bowl would suggest a date of between 1620 and 1640. A single bowl marked 'EL' was recovered (no. 11). This is likely to belong to one of two possible makers working in the area at the time. The first is Edward Lewis who began production in 1631 but was dead by 1652. The second possibility is Elizabeth Lewis who is mentioned as another founder member of the Bristol pipe makers' guild in 1652 (Jackson and Price 1974). Another single bowl was recovered marked 'WC' (Fig. 12, no. 12). Again this is likely to belong to one of two makers, either William Cooper (known

in the area in the early 1640s) or William Carter (also known in the area in the late 1640s and dead by 1647; Jackson and Price 1974). Two unmarked bowls, stylistically dating to 1640–50 and the other to 1640–60 (Walker 1971; Jackson and Price, 1974) were recovered from a modern context (210) and appear to be residual. A further two unmarked bowls, one recovered from the fill of culvert (211) and one recovered from borehole 1 deposit (015) can be dated to 1620–30 (Walker 1971; Jackson and Price 1974). A further unmarked bowl, dating to 1640–60, was also recovered from a secure seventeenth-century context. Those pipes from secure contexts all appear to date from the early part of the seventeenth century (Phase 2) and share a close date range. Rather unsurprisingly the diagnostic examples recovered all appear to be manufactured in Bristol.

#### CERAMICS

By Paul Courtney

The excavations produced a moderate amount of pottery and building ceramics; plus one sherd of red earthenware drainpipe. This assemblage was classified using a  $\times 20$  binocular microscope and quantified by sherd number and metric weight.

The earliest pottery from the site is Malvernian oxidised and Cistercian wares of the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries. The remaining pottery is of late sixteenth- to nineteenth- or twentieth-century date and some ceramics clearly post-date the 1645 destruction of the castle. The assemblage is only not large but is domestic in character and typical of the region. There is nothing to indicate aristocratic occupation and the only Continental imports are Frechen bottle jugs. Sandy micaceous ridge tiles and a single floor tile are potentially the earliest ceramic finds from the site, possibly being thirteenth- or fourteenth-century in date and deriving from a pre-castle manorial structure. However, a fifteenth-century date cannot be entirely ruled out given the lack of firm dating for the demise of the local medieval ceramic industry in Gwent. Certainly Malvernian and Cistercian wares seemed to have filled a void at some point between *c.* 1400 and *c.* 1500.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The excavations, whilst providing a wealth of evidence for the seventeenth-century layout of the area in front of the Great Gatehouse, have shown no such evidence for the later medieval period. The Closet Tower was constructed as an integral piece of the Gatehouse range between 1460 and 1469 (Kenyon 2003) although the recent excavations have shown that at some point the ground level around and to the east of the base of the tower was dropped. This was most likely done at the same time as the construction of the Moat Walk and the walled bowling green in order to create a sense of symmetry in the ground levels either side of the funnelled entranceway upon approach.

The completion of the funnelled entranceway early in the seventeenth century was followed by the construction of the White Gate and the small access bridge. A culvert in the cellar and one to the rear of the new White Gate were installed in order to take rain water to the newly cut ditch in front of the gate. No evidence of any flowerbeds or other garden features to the rear of the new White Gate was located during the excavations. The construction of the White Gate also involved the raising of the ground level to the south, in the area of the car park. This was evidenced by several deposits of material visible within the two borehole excavations. This increase in ground level would also have given the illusion of the newly cut ditch being much deeper than it actually was.



The construction of the White Gate is likely to have been part of the building of the outer court, Red Gate and approach visible on Smythe's map of 1652. The brick 'step' or wall base feature uncovered running parallel with the White Gate ditch may represent part of the outer courts perimeter. Soon after this final landscaping scheme was put in place Raglan Castle suffered the siege of 1646. This led to the abandonment of the castle and the fossilisation of the landscape that surrounded it thus rendering possible this remarkable survival of an early seventeenth-century landscape of the highest quality.

### Acknowledgments

The excavation work at Raglan Castle was undertaken on behalf of Cadw. Many thanks for the smooth running of the various stages of the project, including the composition of this report, are due to Rick Turner. Many thanks are also due to the late Richard Avent. The various excavations within Raglan were undertaken by Kevin Blockley, Mike Anthony and the author as well as many valuable site assistants. Thanks are also due to Paul Courtney for his help with ceramics as well as to the Raglan Castle staff for their understanding. All illustrations were undertaken by the author.

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